



The Syrian Orthodox Church
Yesterday and Today

By

VERY REVEREND A. G. DOUMATO

Pastor

ST. EPHRAIM'S CHURCH

Central Falls, R. I.

1974

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Anyone who asks for this volume, to read, collate, or copy from it, and who appropriates it to himself or herself, or cuts anything out of it, should realize that (s)he will have to give answer before God's awesome tribunal as if (s)he had robbed a sanctuary. Let such a person be held anathema and receive no forgiveness until the book is returned. So be it, Amen! And anyone who removes these anathemas, digitally or otherwise, shall himself receive them in double.

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Church History: Syriac Orthodox

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ARCHDIOCESE OF THE SYRIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

IN THE UNITED STATES & CANADA

293 HAMILTON PLACE • HACKENSACK, NEW JERSEY

June 21, 1974

Very Rev. Abdulahad Doumato
78 Henry Street
Central Falls, Rhode Island 02863

It is with great joy that we hereby approve the publication of Very Rev. Abdulahad Doumato's **Our Syrian Orthodox Faith and Church**. This long awaited booklet will prove of real benefit and interest to our young Sunday School students who we pray will find in the present booklet a source of encouragement to further study the faith and traditions of our venerable Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch. May God bless Very Rev. A. Doumato for his tireless efforts and dedication in bringing this booklet to realization. Through it may our younger generations come to better know and love the faith of their fathers.

Sincerely in Christ,

† Athanasius Y. Samuel,
Archbishop

THE SYRIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH YESTERDAY AND TODAY

The Syrian Orthodox Church uses the Syriac Dialect of Aramaic as its liturgical language. The church submits to the Holy See of Antioch, the ancient capital of Syria. The See of Antioch is traditionally occupied by the Patriarch who is the spiritual head of the entire Syrian Orthodox Church.

ORIGIN AND GEOGRAPHY

The Syrian Orthodox Church finds its origin in the ancient nation of Aram. Aram was the son of Sham and the grandson of Noah. The Land of Aram consisted of what is today known as Syria, Lebanon, Palestine and its boundaries extended to the Persian Gulf on the east and the Mediterranean on the west.

The people of the Land of Aram embraced the wholesome Christian faith from the beginning at the hand of the Lord Jesus Christ and his apostles and preachers. These early believers became the first Christian Church that appeared in Jerusalem and Judea in Palestine.

The language used in worship, liturgy, and rituals by the early church was (and remains until the present) the Syriac or Aramaic, the native tongue of the people of Aram. It was also spoken by the Lord Jesus Christ, His blessed mother, and His righteous apostles. It was in this language that Christianity celebrated the Holy Eucharist (communion) in Jerusalem for the first time and adopted the first liturgy, that of St. James, who was the brother of our Lord Jesus. St. James was the first Bishop of Jerusalem and he composed the liturgy in the Syriac language. From St. James' liturgy, the Greek and Roman churches copied their rituals.

THE SYRIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH ITS BELIEFS

The Syrian Orthodox Church firmly believes in the Holy Trinity consisting of God the father, the Lord Jesus Christ His son (and our savior), and in the Holy Spirit of God. The church also believes in the **one** person and **one** will of Jesus Christ.

The Syrian Orthodox Church believes in the following:

It believes in the proceeding of the Holy Spirit from the father only.

It believes in the virginity of the Virgin Mary, mother of God.

It believes in the incarnation of God in the Virgin Mary.

It believes in the crucifixion of the true incarnated God; that He suffered bodily, died, was buried, and rose from the dead. During this time, His divinity was never separated from His soul and body.

The Syrian Orthodox Church believes in, and confesses the seven known Sacraments. They are:

- (1) Baptism
- (2) Confirmation
- (3) Communion
- (4) Repentance
- (5) Priesthood
- (6) Anointing of the sick
- (7) Marriage

The Church believes in the general resurrection and in the Day of Judgment. It observes Sunday as the Day of the Lord.

The Syrian Orthodox Church celebrates the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist (which is communion) and uses leavened bread, never unleavened bread in this celebration. Both scriptures of the Old and New Testament are read in the church. The Syrian Orthodox Church uses incense during the Holy Liturgy.

THE COUNCILS

The Syrian Orthodox Church acknowledges and professes the faith and doctrine of the first three Ecumenical Councils. They are:

1. The Council of Nicea held in the year 325 A.D. which was presided over by St. Austathius, Patriarch of Antioch.

2. The Council of Constantinople held in the year 381 A.D. which was presided over by St. Malatius, Patriarch of Antioch.

3. The Council of Ephesus held in the year 431 A.D. which was presided over by St. Cyril, Patriarch of Alexandria.

The church accepts the Nicene Creed which was confirmed by the Council of Constantinople and sealed by the Council of Ephesus.

The Syrian Orthodox Church denounces the Council of Chalcedon held in the year 451 A.D.

THE CREED

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the only-begotten, the begotten from the Father before all the worlds, light of light, very God of very God, begotten not made, consubstantial with the Father by whom all things were made.

Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnated by the Holy Ghost and of the Virgin Mary, Mother of God, and was made man.

And was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and He suffered, died and was buried.

And the Third Day rose according to his will.

And ascended into heaven and sitteth on the right hand of the Father.

And He shall come again with great glory to judge the living and the dead, whose Kingdom shall have no end.

And we believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord, the giver of life to all, who proceedeth from the Father, who together with the Father and Son is worshipped and glorified, who spoke through the Prophets and Apostles.

And in one, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church.

We confess one Baptism for the remission of sins.

And we look for the Resurrection of the dead.

And a new life in the world to come.

Amen.

PRESENT STATUS

In the past, the Syrian Orthodox Church claimed millions as her followers, but the number has decreased throughout the centuries. Today, there are over one million faithful members of the church dwelling in Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Iraq, Turkey, Egypt, India, the United States, Canada, Europe and some countries of South America. In education, the church has high schools, a number of colleges, and two theological seminaries, one in Lebanon and one in India.

The head of the present day church is the Illustrious Scholar Mar Ignatius Yacoub the Third, Successor to the Apostle St. Peter as Patriarch of Antioch. Being the one hundredth and twenty-first in the chronology of legitimate patriarchs of Antioch, he holds the title "His Holiness Patriarch of Antioch and all the East." His headquarters today is in Damascus, the capital of Syria. In reality, the Patriarch's rightful seat is in St. Hanania Monastery (Deir El-Zaafaran) in Mardin, Turkey. Historically, this is the most ancient patriarchal seat in the east. In addition, the church has twenty-four archbishops who guide their respective archdioceses. One of these includes the United States and Canada.

THE SYRIAN ORTHODOX MONASTERIES

The Syrian Orthodox Church, in order to strengthen her religious orders, uplift the conditions of her monks, and uphold the philosophy of the Christian religion, established monasteries. In the fourth century hundreds of these monasteries were in existence in many parts of the Antiochian See. Thousands and thousands entered these monasteries. These faithful men and women renounced the flattery of this world and devoted themselves to the ideals of piety, chastity, humility, obedience, fasting, and constant prayer.

The men and women of these monasteries made a great contribution to civilization by the copying of many great volumes of biblical and secular books.

Four of these ancient monasteries are still in existence. They are:

St. Mark's Monastery in Jerusalem.

Historically, this holds great importance for the entire Christian faith, for it was in this house that the Last Supper (including the washing of the feet of the Twelve Disciples) took place. The house belonged to Mary, the mother of John called Mark and Jesus performed many of his outstanding deeds while in this house. The descent of the Holy Spirit upon the 12 Disciples (called Pentecost) took place here after Jesus' resurrection. Because of its significance, the house was made the residence of the First Bishop of Jerusalem. All Syrian Orthodox Archbishops of Jerusalem (including the present bishop) have honored this tradition and maintain their residence in this very house.

The Monastery of St. Hanania (known as Deir-El-Zaafaarn), east of Mardin (Turkey), an ancient and large monastery, became a patriarchal seat in the year 1293 A.D.

St. Matthew on Mount El-Faf, located east of Mosul, Iraq, has been maintained until the present.

St. Gabriel's Monastery is located in the mountains of Tur Abdeen, east of Midyat, Turkey.

THE SYRIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH IN THE U.S.A. AND CANADA

The head of this Archdiocese is His Eminence Mar Athanasius Yeshue Samuel, who has his official residence in Hackensack, New Jersey. His title is Archbishop of the Syrian Orthodox Church of the United States and Canada. Eleven churches compose this Archdiocese. They are:

1. **Saint Mark's Cathedral**, Hackensack, New Jersey
2. **Saint Mary's Church**, Paramus, New Jersey
3. **Saint Ephraim's Church**, Central Falls, Rhode Island
4. **Saint Mary's Church**, Worcester, Mass.
5. **Saint Ephraim's Church**, Los Angeles California
6. **Saint John's Church**, Chicago, Illinois
7. **Saint John's Church**, Detroit, Michigan
8. **Saints Peter and Paul's Church**, Southfield, Michigan
9. **St. Ephraim's Church**, Sherbrooke, Quebec, Canada
10. **Saint James Church**, Montreal, Canada
11. **Saint Paul's Church**, Toronto, Ontario, Canada

SELECTED LEADERS OF THE SYRIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

St. James

(the brother of our Lord Jesus) † 61 A.D.

St. James, the son of Joseph the Carpenter, was one of the 70 preachers of the Gospel. In 42 A.D., before the Twelve Apostles scattered on their various missions, they consecrated St. James the First Bishop of Jerusalem. St. James was martyred by enemies of the Christians while he was praying in church in 61 A.D.

The first liturgy ever used in Jerusalem and Antioch was written by St. James in Syriac and later adopted by the Greek and Roman churches.

The Syrian Orthodox Church and its members venerate St. James for his sacrifices on behalf of the church and for his liturgy which is presently used in the original Syriac language.

St. Ephraim † 373 A.D.

St. Ephraim was born in Nusaybin, Syria (present site is the northeast border of Syria and Turkey) and was instructed in Christianity and baptized in his native city. After his ordination as Deacon by Bishop James of Nisaybin, St. Ephraim accompanied the Bishop to the First Ecumenical Council of Nicea in the year 325.

Nusaybin was occupied by the Persians in 363, thus forcing St. Ephraim and the Christians of the city to flee to Edessa (present day Urfa). In Edessa, St. Ephraim was involved with teaching, writing hymns, and poetry. St. Ephraim achieved fame in his lifetime for his poetical works and was known as the Great Christian Poet of Syria.

St. Ephraim has been given many names praising the works which he accomplished in his lifetime. He is called the “Harp of the Holy Spirit” because of the many commentaries which he wrote on the scriptures.

St. Ephraim was very concerned with the youth of the Syrian Orthodox Church and encouraged them to participate in the Mass. St. Ephraim was the first leader of the church to allow young women to form a choir and chant the liturgical hymns.

Despite his fame St. Ephraim remained a humble, dedicated Deacon within the Syrian Orthodox Church.

St. Severius of Antioch,
Crown of the Syrian Church † 538 A.D.

St. Severius was born in 459 in the State of Besaideeya and was the grandson of the Bishop of this state. (The Bishop present at the Council of Ephesus in 431 A.D.) St. Severius received his doctoral degree in theology and philosophy from Alexandria, Egypt and from Beirut, Lebanon. In 488 A.D., he became a monk in Myoma, Palestine, where he built a monastery and served for 24 years teaching and preaching the word of God.

On November 6, 512 A.D., St. Severius was ordained Patriarch of Antioch and all the East. Because of a division between the eastern and western churches, St. Severius went into exile in Egypt in the year 518. In Egypt, this Holy Father continued his work, building a monastery which presently retains its original name (Deir El-Syrian), monastery of the Syrian Church. From his headquarters in Egypt, St. Severius guided the Syrian Orthodox Church and maintained peace within the church for 20 years until his death in 538.

St. Severius is remembered by the many epistles, sermons and scholarly works which he wrote and which have been preserved for present generations. For his contributions to the teachings of the church, he was designated a Doctor of the Church.

St. Jacob Burdonno † 578 A.D.

St. Jacob was one of the Holiest Fathers and a pioneer of the Syrian Orthodox Church. By the request and preparation of Empress Theodora, St. Jacob was ordained Ecumenical Metropolitan by Theodosius, Patriarch of Antioch.

St. Jacob Burdonno overcame tremendous hardships in his travels throughout Asia Minor, reaching Mesopotamia, Persia, Cyprus, and Egypt to preach the teachings of the church. Beside preaching on his travels, he increased the strength and faith of the church by ordaining twenty-seven bishops and thousands of priests and deacons in his thirty-five years of service as Metropolitan.

He died on July 30, 578 in Egypt and was later nicknamed Burdonno (The Saddler) because of his humble origin as the son of a saddle maker.

St. John, Abou Sedreh † 648 A.D.

St. John was ordained Patriarch of Antioch in 631 A.D. At the request of the Arab chieftains, he translated the New Testament from Syriac into Arabic. This translation was important to the many Arabic-speaking people of the church. Now, for the first time they were able to read and understand the Bible.

The prayer and invocation written by St. John was included in the ritual of the church and is still used today. St. John continued to write prayers for the many rituals of our church until his death in 648 A.D.

St. Jacob of Edessa † 708 A.D.

St. Jacob was born in 633 in a small town near Antioch and was ordained Bishop of Edessa in 684. St. Jacob was more than an Illustrious Bishop, he was a poet and scholar of literature who enlarged upon the work of St. Ephraim. St. Jacob wrote many more poems which were longer than those of St. Ephraim.

St. Jacob is a Doctor of the Church and the poems which he composed are chanted in the morning and evening prayers of the church.

St. Dionysius Jacob, Ibn Salibee † 1171 A.D.

St. Dionysius was born in Malatia, Mesopotamia and became Bishop of Amid (Diyarbekir) in 1148. He wrote an explanation of the books of the New Testament in several volumes. This scholarly work was of great value to both students and teachers of the Bible. In this way, St. Dionysius succeeded in glorifying both God and the church.

After his death in 1171, the church honored him for his devotion and proclaimed him a Doctor of the Church.

Michael the Great † 1199 A.D.

Mar Michael was born in Malatia (Mesopotamia) in 1126 and was ordained Patriarch of Antioch in 1166. He established the Patriarchal Seat at Deir-El-Zaafaran Monastery where it remained throughout his 33 years as Patriarch and for 7 generations after him. Michael is recognized as a Doctor of the Church, in addition to being a scholar and a skilled administrator.

The Crusaders, who were in the Middle East at the time of Michael, consulted him often, and because of his sincerity, Michael was respected by them. Michael's scholarly contributions to the church include his History of Civilization and four volumes written on the history of the Syrian Orthodox Church.

Mar Gregorius, Bar Hebraeus † 1286 A.D.

Mar Gregorius was born of a noble Christian family in the year 1226 at Malatia, Mesopotamia. Due to his vast knowledge and understanding, he was ordained Bishop at 21, a very young age for so great an honor. On January 19, 1264, he was elevated to the position of Maferyono or Catholicos of the East.

Doctor, professor, poet, and noted scholar of astronomy and medicine, Bar Hebraeus wrote over 33 books on various subjects including theology, philosophy, and history.

Mar Gregorius died on July 30, 1286 in St. Matthew's Monastery at Mosul, Iraq.

Patriarch Ignatius Noah, the Lebanese
† 1509 A.D.

Patriarch Noah was born in Lebanon in 1451 and was converted from the Maronite Church to the Syrian Orthodox Church while still a youth. He entered the Syrian Orthodox Seminary and was ordained Bishop of Homs, Syria in 1480. Thirteen years later (1493) Noah was consecrated Patriarch of Antioch and all the East.

Patriarch Noah, because of his dignified manner, was respected by people of all religions. On July 28, 1509, he died in the city of Hama, Syria.

Patriarch Ignatius Peter IV † 1894 A.D.

Peter the IV was born in the city of Mosul, Iraq in 1802. As a young child, he moved from Mosul with his mother to Deir El-Zaafaran Monastery where he lived and studied until his ordination as Bishop of Homs, Syria in 1846. On June 4, 1882, Peter IV became Patriarch of Antioch by a vote of all the Archbishops (the traditional method for selection of Patriarchs in the Syrian Orthodox Church).

Patriarch Peter was a zealous defender of his church, working always to strengthen it throughout the world. He travelled to India where he consecrated seven Bishops for the existing dioceses. As the head of the Syrian Orthodox Church, he was recognized by several kings and queens who awarded him medals. The most famous of these was Queen Victoria of England who presented Patriarch Peter with one printing press. This press continues to serve our monastery of Deir El-Zaafaran.

On September 25, 1894, Patriarch Peter died at Deir El-Zaafaran, which had been his childhood home.

Patriarch Ignatius Ephraim I Barsoum

† 1957 A.D.

Patriarch Ephraim I was born in Mosul, Iraq on June 15, 1887 and entered Deir El-Zaafaran Monastery in 1907. In 1918, he became Archbishop of all Syria and Lebanon and on January 30, 1933, he was consecrated Patriarch of Antioch and all the East, with his Patriarchal Seat in Homs, Syria. Renowned as a great scholar, Patriarch Ephraim's many books include **A History of the Sciences and Literature of the Church**. He established St. Ephraim's Seminary in Lebanon.

Bishop Ephraim was chosen to attend the League of Nations in Geneva, Switzerland where he headed a delegation. Throughout his lifetime, he supported the building of churches and, as a concerned scholar, he encouraged numerous new schools.

Inspired by his unshakable faith and devotion, Patriarch Ephraim proudly lectured on the history of the church at universities in the Middle East (Damascus, Egypt, and Lebanon) the United States (Brown University and the University of Chicago), and much of Europe.

On June 23, 1957, he died in Homs, Syria, but he is remembered by the church and her faithful for the dignity and respect which he commanded as Patriarch of Antioch.

